University of Glasgow participates in an exciting development in life sciences research

Over the past five years the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the body which provides Government money to Scottish Universities, has been investing to enhance the excellence of the research base in Scotland. Consortia of Universities have been encouraged to bid under the “Research Pooling Scheme” for substantial funding to strengthen particular fields.

The largest investment has been made in life sciences where Scotland is already recognised to have a world leading position. The SFC and six Scottish universities (Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrews, and Strathclyde) have agreed to invest together £77 million to move life sciences research in Scotland to new heights. With £27 million from SFC and £50 million from the universities over five years, 9 new research professors and more than 30 other researchers will be attracted to Scotland to strengthen this critical research area that is the key to the future health, wealth and environmental quality and sustainability of Scotland.

The areas chosen by the Scottish Universities Life Sciences Alliance (SULSA), for investment are: cell biology – the study of the basic unit of life; systems biology – using computers to model the behaviour of molecules, cells and populations of cells and organisms and thereby advance our understanding of living systems; and translational biology – the application of biological knowledge to develop medicines and other therapies for eventual clinical use.

The University of Glasgow has been most fortunate to recruit two of the nine SULSA research Professors.

Professor Neil Bulleid, presently at the University of Manchester, has been recruited to a Chair of Cell Biology. Neil’s research is on how proteins, the key machines of living organisms, are correctly made, and most importantly folded and assembled into their correct functional form in cells. Protein folding requires a subset of proteins able to catalyse the folding reactions and to act as molecular chaperones preventing the formation of non-functional protein aggregates. The inability of cells to carry out the folding process results in some of the most catastrophic mammalian diseases such as cystic fibrosis, Alzheimer’s and CJD. Neil’s research is suggesting new approaches for the treatment of these diseases.

Professor Rainer Breitling, presently at the University of Groningen, has been recruited to a Chair of Bioinformatics and Systems Biology. Rainer’s research involves using mathematical modelling techniques to understand how the complex metabolic networks in cells are controlled. This has particular relevance to understanding diseases such as cancer and diabetes and identifying key targets for therapeutic intervention.

The University plays a role in Duke’s ‘Living History’ program

The Presiding Officer (Speaker) of the Scottish Parliament, Mr Alex Fergusson MSP, will participate in a guest seminar at Duke University on Friday 10th April, as part of his visit to the United States for Tartan Week 2009. Mr Fergusson will be interviewed and recorded as part of the Duke ‘Living History’ program, involving individuals who are influential in global politics.

This event has been brought about by the long-standing exchange program which exists between Duke and the University of Glasgow, which sees a group of public policy undergraduates spend the fall semester studying in Glasgow’s Politics department. In November 2008, 13 Duke students visited the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh, and participated in a thirty minute question and answer session with the Presiding Officer.

The ‘Duke in Glasgow’ program has now been running for over 25 years and involves two of the world’s most renowned schools of politics and public policy.
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A copy of its latest annual report may be obtained, upon request, from its Treasurer.

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ALUMNI PROFILE

Nicholas H Dodman

BVMS 1970

Nick Dodman began his career in Veterinary Medicine at the University with a strong backing from the late Sir William Weipers. When quizzed in his entrance interview if he could name three pathogenic protozoa, he reeled off “Trypanosoma, Monocystis, and Entamoeba” and received an unconditional offer to the Faculty.

His most memorable moment occurred during his visit for the aforementioned interview: On entering the campus he was confronted by a dead cow in the road, and he thought that this was his first test. He imagined faculty members crouched in the bushes watching his every move, only later to discover that he had wandered passed the front of the post-mortem room, and that nothing sinister was going on!

Nick graduated in 1970 and was an intern for a year before a six-month sponse in the San Francisco Bay Area. He returned to the UK and soon after took up position as a lecturer in the Surgery Department at the Glasgow Vet School from 1972 – 1981.

When he came to Glasgow at the age of 19 he was a bit “wet behind the ears”, “The experiences I had both at the University and in Scotland, in general, over the next five years opened my eyes to the real world. When I returned to Glasgow as a faculty member for an additional 9-year stint, I became a Glaswegian at heart and even my best friends, who were all Scottish, managed to look past my English accent”.

During the early 1980’s Nick headed back to the USA. He joined the Faculty of Tufts University Veterinary School in Massachusetts where he has enjoyed an extremely busy career. Developing the anaesthesiology service from the ground up, Nick became Head of the Behaviour section, taught students, conducted research, and lately began to write popular press books to interpret the world of science to the pet-owning public.

Nick very much enjoys spending time with his family and pets as well as cooking and playing golf.

His wife, Linda, is also a veterinarian and has a small house call practice that she runs from home. Nick has four children, two boys, Stevie and Danny, and two girls Vicki and Keisha.

His greatest achievement since leaving University? “I would have to say that balancing an interesting but sometimes demanding academic career with a happy family life including raising four delightful and intelligent children is my greatest accomplishment”.

ALUMNI PROFILE

Kathleen Lank

(JYA 2008)

Kathleen travelled to the University in 2007 on a year long exchange programme with McGill University, Montreal, after Glasgow was recommended to her. “I was sitting in class next to an exchange student from Edinburgh who had become a close friend, who told me to “just go” and that Glasgow was “even better than Edinburgh.” I figured that was good enough local knowledge, and immediately accepted!”

She was immediately taken with the architecture and the cloisters of the main building, and soon settled into the stride of student life at Glasgow. Her studies were focused around Geography, Theatre, Film and Television, and French so she could keep up the primary language of Montreal. She found Glasgow both academic and extremely social and joined many groups including a local dance school as well as going along to a few Jewish society pub nights “More than anything because the tax and cream cheese bagels were free!”

“The experience was so wild and out there (moving somewhere all alone for an entire year knowing nothing about the destination) that no move or travel will ever seem scary again. I came home more confident and more aware of what a great friendship is.”

Kathleen joined the Alumni Office and worked on the bi-annual Telephone Campaign. “I ended up really enjoying the work: people on the phone were very receptive and I got on really well with the other students I worked with.”

The Board currently has three Directors, all of whom are Glasgow University alumni.

AAGU founder Melvyn Pond (BVMS 1966) (President) is a Diplomate, American College of Veterinary Surgeons, and specializes in small animal orthopedic surgery in his Connecticut based referral practice. Melvyn can be reached at melvynpond@aol.com.

Vivek Thakur (MBA 1993) (Treasurer) is a Director for a large multinational bank in one of its New York offices. After obtaining his MBA, he moved to Bombay, India where he worked for a commodity export firm. He moved to New York in 1998. Vivek can be reached at vivekthakur@comcast.net.

Esther Steinhauer (Ph D 1976) (Secretary) is a patent attorney in the New York office of an international law firm, where her practice focuses on patent litigation. After obtaining her Ph D, she spent several years doing basic research in immunology and biochemistry at Albert Einstein College of Medicine. Esther can be reached at esteinhau@hunton.com.

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Event round up

2008 New York
Dinner and Ceilidh
Alumni and friends gathered in the ambient surroundings of the Penn Club for the 2008 Fall Dinner on Saturday 18th October. Guests enjoyed a drinks reception and meal before hearing from Sir Muir Russell, Principal, about current developments at the University. Alumnus Dr David U’Pritchard (BSc 1970) proposed a warm hearted and interesting Toast to the University and thanked Muir for his direction and leadership over the last few years as Principal. Guests danced until after midnight to music provided by Madra Confach.

2008 Toronto
Annual Dinner and Ceilidh
More than 60 alumni and guests attended the annual dinner and ceilidh at Victoria College, University of Toronto, on Sunday 19 October. The Principal, Sir Muir Russell, had to calm a rather rowdy table of guests before he could officially welcome everyone to the evening, which was a sign that it was going to be fun night. Blanch Carragher (BSc 1959) delivered a wonderful Toast to the University, full of stories and memories, and thanked Muir of behalf of all the alumni in attendance for his efforts. Guests enjoyed some energetic Ceilidh dancing thanks to music provided by Fred Moyes.

2009 Washington DC
Burns Supper
A great night was had by all 70 guests at the fourth annual Burns Supper at the Willard Intercontinental on the 19th of February. Clark McGinn (MA 1983) was on fine form as he delivered his spectacular Address to the Haggis. The Principal, Sir Muir, updated guests on our Glasgow activities while they enjoyed the wonderful dinner and sumptuous surroundings of the venue. Entertainment in the form of Scottish Bagpipes was provided by Bob Mitchell, and the evening of fun was rounded off with ceilidh dancing and tunes from ‘A Sheep at the Wheel’.

2009 Chicago
Burns Supper
Alumni and friends gathered in the spectacular surroundings of the University Club’s grand Cathedral Hall for the third annual Burns Supper and Ceilidh. Attending his first alumni event in Chicago, the Principal, Sir Muir, was able to share some of the history of the grand venue before updating guests on current developments at the University. Clark McGinn (MA 1983) took to the stage to Address the Haggis in his usual theatrical and entertaining manner. Scott Metcalfe (MEng 1999) proposed a complimentary and fun Toast to the Lassies and his wife, Miriam, returned the sentiment with her witty Reply – Toast to the Laddies. Glen Ayre led guests in a lively Ceilidh to round off a fun and enjoyable evening.

2009 Houston
Burns Supper
More than 450 guests attended the 250th anniversary of Burns birthday event in Houston, where Dr Robert Boyd (BSc. 1969) led proceedings. A number of other Glasgow University alumni also attended this special event. The ceremony was timed to coincide with an international internet simulcast where pictures of Burns gatherings around the globe were taken at 1pm Pacific time on January 25th.

Forthcoming events
Keep an eye on our webpages for up-to-date information:
www.glasgow.ac.uk/alumni/events.
We are planning on holding alumni receptions in Los Angeles and Boston in May 2009; invitations will be emailed and posted in advance of the occasion.

1 Chicago Burns Supper
2 Houston Burns Supper
3 Toronto
4 Washington DC
5 Washington DC

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